

The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves

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Preliminary 90-Day Report

On the fifth of June, the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves issued its required 90-day preliminary report. If there is one thing going on in Washington which may quickly and directly affect the lives of Navy Reservists, be they officers or enlisted, it is the work of this commission. The Commission's final report will be issued on or shortly after 1 March 2007. There is every likelihood that this final report will generate significant legislation. We encourage our readers to visit the Commission's Web site at www.cngr.gov to stay informed along the way. (You can read Force Master Chief Pennington's testimony by going to the Association Web site at www.navy-reserve.org, under "legislation," click on "Force" to get his testimony. VADM Cotton will testify in July, and we will post that as well.)

The Commission on the National Guard and Reserves was created by Public Law 108-375 which was the appropriations bill, formally known as the Ronald W. Reagan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005 (see the editorial on page 4 for more information on how your Association was involved). The thirteen members of the Commission, whose pictures are on the cover of this issue, were appointed by the chairs and ranking minority members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees and by the Secretary of Defense. Among them is J. Stanton Thompson, a recently retired Navy Reserve rear admiral. For those interested in their qualifications, their biographies can be found on the Commission Web site.

The Commission's mission statement gives one a good sense of the breadth of the Commission's work: To identify and recommend changes in policy, law, regulation, and practice to ensure that the National Guard and Reserves are organized, trained, equipped, compensated, and supported to meet best the national security requirements of the United States. In testimony before the Commission, Senator Warner (R-VA), Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee said: *"The continuing operational demands placed on Guardsmen, Reservists, and their families, at home and abroad, during a time of transformational change for the Armed Forces, have raised critically important questions about the appropriate roles for the state National Guards, and our Reserve forces. Careful consideration needs to be given to the missions assigned to the Guard and Reserves, to the level of resources and equipment that must be provided for their use, and other career paths and benefits that should be available to Guardsmen and Reservists . . ."*

The Commission's preliminary report listed seven findings which they said were "purposefully general" but will serve as the foundation for the remainder of their work. To spare you some lengthy rhetoric, we quote here the three which will touch Navy Reservists the most:

"3. The sustained operational use of and potential future demands on the Reserve Components pose challenges that must be addressed.

"4. A balance between the use of the Reserve Components as an operational and as a strategic reserve, as necessary to meet national security objectives, must be achieved; and the Reserve Components must be tasked, organized, trained, equipped, and funded accordingly.

"5. Statutes and policies that adversely affect the Reserve Components must be revised and updated."

The language accompanying these findings makes it clear that the Commission recognizes key issues that will be difficult to solve. One is that the current operations require continued use of significant numbers of Guard and Reserve personnel. At the same time, some Service vice chiefs have testified that the Reserve Components have been stretched to their limits. Speaking for the Navy, VCNO, ADM Robert Willard, spoke very highly of the Navy Reserve and did not say that Navy Reservists were overused. He did stress that the Navy would continue to move to an operational reserve vice a strategic reserve. He also stressed that, in keeping with recommendations of the 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the Navy would shape its Reserve Component for Homeland Security and disaster relief. (His complete testimony can be found on the cngr Web site under "public hearings, witness statements, 8th & 9th March.")

A second key issue is recognition that the country should retain some measure of a strategic reserve and properly equip it. The "operationalizing" of the Reserve Components has essentially eliminated the strategic reserve. How to reestablish balance is not going to be an easy task, but it is one with which the Commission feels obligated to deal. The Commission put it this way: "Policy makers must strike an appropriate and sustainable balance between the operational and strategic use of the Reserve Components that will be necessary to achieve national security objectives in a long war. Moreover, the Reserve Components must be tasked, organized, trained, equipped, and funded to fulfill the requirements associated with both roles." How this ultimately plays out for Navy Reservists will be interesting to watch in light of the fact that the Navy seems to have decided not to equip a strategic reserve but to utilize Reservists as an integrated manpower pool for Active Component ships, squadrons, and units.

The third issue, associated with finding number five, is that many of the policies and laws which govern the Reserve Components are still outdated Cold War remnants. The Commission specifically sites "personnel policies and regulations that impede the efficient and seamless transitions necessary to support a continuum of service." There is also recognition that even some current policy changes, with regards to compensation and benefits, have created "unfair treatment of service members performing substantially the same service but in different duty statuses." Whenever someone uses the words *compensations* or *benefits*, it behooves all of us to pay attention. Something good can result, or something bad can result. But, change is in the wind. ♪